DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 798 CS 507 019

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TITLE Using Storytelling To Teach Oral Communication Competencies K-12.
PUB DATE Nov 89
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (75th, San Francisco, CA, November 18-21, 1989). Some of the appendixes contain broken dot matrix type.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Activities; *Communication Skills; Elementary Secondary Education; Oral Interpretation; Oral Language; Story Grammar; *Story Telling; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Communication Competencies; Story Concepts; Story Content; Story Structure; *Story Telling by Children

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the benefits of storytelling, especially for the classroom teacher. The paper provides 12 activities for students (Kindergarten-12) to demonstrate how storytelling can help develop communication competencies. The activities included in the paper are: folktale cinquain, The Wicked Stepmother Gets Her Day in Court, storytelling troupe, tall tales, Our Town, round robin storytelling, spin a yarn, picture book stories, personal stories, tell me a story, storytelling festival, and oral history. The paper also provides six activities, to be used as a follow-up to storytelling, which develop the following communication competencies: expanding power of reasoning; problem-solving competencies; listening effectively to spoken language; using nonverbal cues that emphasize meaning; and using spoken language creatively to enjoy and participate in imaginative situations. Appendixes include 81 resources and evaluation forms for assessing students' performances. An additional 52-item resource list is also attached. (MG)

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Using Storytelling to Teach Oral Communication Competencies K-12

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CS507019

Speech Communication Association Convention

November 18-21, 1989

San Francisco

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> One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bull-dozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

So begins O'Henry's story The Gift of the Magi. As a child I was mesmerized every time my mother read or told me this story. The story remains a favorite of mine. Perhaps the story appeals to me because I am a romantic. Perhaps it appeals to me because I've always coveted beautiful long thick hair and so I can understand the sacrifice Della makes. Perhaps I love this story simply because it's a wonderful story.

We may not all be as eloquent a storyteller as O'Henry, but we are all, nonetheless, storytellers. We tell stories every day. The parent asks the child "What did you do in school today?" The wife asks her husband (and the husband asks

his wife!). "How was work today?" The college student calls home, "You'll never guess what happened!" We will all, no doubt, be telling stories about this 75th Anniversary Convention for years to come! The point is, humans are storytelling animals. We tell stories to make sense of our lives, to share our experiences, and to share ourselves.

Fisher (1984) indicates that the essential nature of human beings is that they are the storytelling animal - the "homo narran." Other writers concur. For example, Heilbrun (1989) says we live our lives through our text. In other words, we are the stories we tell. These stories create a "witchery" - even making the mundane significant (Nell, 1988). It is through stories that we become "in cahoots" with one another (Coles, 1989). Storytellers Ellin Greene and Laura Simms asked children, "What would happen if there were no stories in the world?" The children gave some very perceptive answers as recorded in the Chicago Journal , May 26, 1982:

> "People would die of seriousness."
>
> "When you went to bed at night it would be boring, because your head would be blank."
>
> "There wouldn't be a world, because stories make the world."

Values of Storytelling

Storyteller Jay O'Callahan defines storytelling as a musical medium in which the teller is the instrument. The music comes from the sound of the teller -- the tones and pauses, the inflections and rhythms, the sounds of names and places, the very shape given to a word. Livo and Rietz (1986) define story as an "art form whose practice provides a means of preserving and transmitting images, ideas, motivations, and emotions that are universal across communities" (p.7).

The values of storytelling are many. Maguire (19) suggests:

> Children today are immersed in an overtly visual world of television, computers, and video arcades, which is having a disastrous effect on their abilities to listen, to think in words, and to exercise the 'mind's eye.' Even reading aloud to children is frequently directing them to concentrate on what they see: the book that contains the text of the story.

Noting the rapid decline of language skills over the past two generations, child psychologists and educators are now actively championing storytelling as an ideal method of influencing a child to associate listening with pleasure, of increasing a child's attention span and retention capacity, of broadening a child's vocabulary, and of introducing a child to the symbolic use of language. The specific educational and social benefits of storytelling from the child's point of view are numerous and well documented. In addition to increasing a child's vocabulary, concentration, and ability to think symbolically and metaphorically, storytelling's values also include:

- building a child's sensitivity to various forms of syntax, diction, and rhetoric;
- helping a child to recognize patterns in language and in human experience;
- stimulating a child's overall powers of creativity;
- providing a child with problem-solving and decision-making exercises;
- strengthening a child's capacity to form objective, rational, and practical evaluations;
- assisting a child to develop skills in dialogue and cooperative interpersonal behavior;
- familiarizing a child with the symbols, artifacts, and traditions

that are part of his or her own cultural heritage:

. introducing a child to the symbols, artifacts, and traditions that characterize the cultural heritages of others with whom he or she shares the world.

(p.13-14)

Perhaps most important, storytelling is fun. Storytelling is not a spectator sport. The listener and teller are united in the building of the story. The listener may engage in one or more types of participation: ritual, coactive, bantering, predictive, and eye contact (Livo and Rietz, 1986).

Story Telling Activities/Communication Competencies

Depending on the teacher's objective, storytelling can be used to help students develop a variety of communication competencies. In this section, I have outlined a few activities and matched them to a communication competency. Keep in mind, however, that, with a different "twist" these same activities could be used to teach a different competency.

Activity 1: Folktale Cinquain*
Grade Level: 3-4

Competency: Listens effectively to spoken messages

After children have heard several tales, they will have a good sense of story. Have children write a folktale cinquain (a five line poem) by first picking a character in one of the stories and then writing according to the pattern. A sample cinquain and the pattern follow:

Line One: one word, a noun	GIRL
Line Two: two words, adjectives	SWEET, LOVELY
Line Three: three words, verbs	SCRUBBED, CLEANED, CRIED
Line Four: four words that show feeling	DANCED AWAY HER TEARS

Line Five: one word, a synonym for CINDERELLA

line one

Students should share their cinquains in small groups.

*from Activities With Folktales and Fairytales ; Nancy Polette(1979,Book Lures)

Activity 2: The Wicked Stepmother Gets Her Day in Court

Grade Level: 7-12

Competency: Describe another's viewpoint

Have students choose a fairytale aand tell it from the perspective of another character, for example, Goldilocks and the Three Bears from the bears' perspective. Prior to this activity, the teacher could share the book The Jolly Postman or Other People's Letters ,(Janet and Allen Ahlberg, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., (1986), or a selection from "Stepmothers with Bad P.R. (from Erma Bombeck's Motherhood: The Second Oldest Profession , New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983).

Activity 3: Storytelling Troupe

Grade Level: 7-12

Competency: All

Students choose and prepare stories, deciding on the appropriate grade level. They might choose to make costumes and use props or musical instruments to use in their presentations. The idea of this activity is to allow students to makes the majority of the decisions concerning the organization of the troupe, the stories told and the props, etc. used. Students could tell to other classes, elementary schools or retirement homes.

Activity 4: Tall Tales

Grade Level: 4-6

Competency: Seeks, offers, and responds to information.

Have students collect some good excuses ("I couldn't do my homework because...") and then create and tell tall tales.

Activity 5: Our Town

Grade Level: 7-12

Competency: Use words, pronunication, and grammar appropriate for the situation; organize messages so others can understand.

Have students work in small groups, inventing their own imaginary town and telling stories about its inhabitants. Get them started by sharing some of Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon stories. Even your youngest students can enjoy "Dog Days of August" and "Tomato Butt" from News from Lake Wobegon.

Activity 6: Round Robin Storytelling

Grade Level: K-12

Competency: Listens effectively; uses language creatively to enjoy and participate in imaginative situations

Seat everyone in a circle and signal one person to begin a story. A good opening line is: "The worst thing that could possibly happen began on a cold Wednesday..." At random intervals, signal the next student to continue the tale (or let the first teller pick the next one).

Activity 7: Spin a Yarn

Grade Level: 3-6

Competency: Listen effectively; present ideas in an orderly way

This activity requires a simple prop to get children involved in storytelling. Take a long piece of brightly colored yarn and tie many equally spaced knots in the yarn. Begin with the first knot, and as you run the yarn between thumb and forefinger, the story begins. For example: The yarn is slowly

drawn between the fingers as the story begins but is passed to the next person when the fingers arrive at the first knot. The next player proceeds to the next knot as another line or two is added to the story. Your beginning line should immediately suggest some problem, conflict, or element of adventure so that a storyline is begun which can lead to a climax and ending.

Activity 8: Picture Book Stories

Grade Level: 1-2

Competency: Present ideas in an orderly way; clarifies and supports ideas with necessary details

Gather several wordless picture books. Have students tell the story to a group of their peers. Suggestions for wordless picture books include:

Monique Felix (1980). The story of a little mouse trapped in a book. La Jolla, CA: Green Tiger Press.

Mercer Mayer (1974). Two more moral tales. New York: Four Winds.

Mercer Mayer (1967). A boy, a dog, and a frog. New York: Dial Press.

Mitsumasa, A. (1982). Anno's Britain. New York: Philomel.

Terry Morris (1980). Goodnight, dear monster. New York:Alfred A. Knopf

Wiesner, D. (1988). Free fall. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books

Activity 9: Personal Stories

Grade Level: 3-6

Competency: Speak clearly and expressively; Use spoken language to express own and respond to others' feelings.

Motivate students to tell personal stories using topics such as :

a. "On rainy days, I..."

b. "When I grow up, I would like to..."

c. "Once I had a pet that..."

d. "Last summer I..."

e. "The origin of my last name is..."

f. "If I had one wish, I would..."

g. "My favorite thing..."

h. "The best thing that ever happened to me..."

i. "Happiness is..."

In addition to telling the stories, students could write down their stories and illustrate them.

Activity 10: Tell me a story

Grade Level: K-12

Competency: Speak clearly and expressively

Have students tell a favorite story to others in their class. Students will need instruction in storytelling techniques (see list of resources) prior to this activity.

Activity 11: Storytelling Festival

Grade Le el: 3-6

Competency: Speaks clearly and expressively; uses nonverbal cues that emphasize meaning.

Encourage anyone interested to choose a piece of literature, prepare and rehearse it for storytelling. Share the stories with others in the class; invite their comments. Polish the stories and invite another class to a Storytelling Festival. Literature chosen might be around a theme, such as: families are special; or a favorite author, such as cuttings from the works of Katherine Patterson or Dr. Seuss.

Activity 12: Oral History

Grade Level: 4-12

Competency: Ask questions to obtain innformation

Have students collect family stories and then tell them. Students will need some instruction in interviewing skills prior to this activity. (See Appendix for sample interview forms).

Numerous activities can be used as follow-up activities to storytelling. Let your imagination go "hog wild." Below are a few suggestions:

1. When you are telling a story, end it before its conclusion. Ask students to predict what will happenn. Then finish telling the story (Expand power of reasoning).
2. Ask students "How else could the person have solved the problem?" (Problem-solving competencies).
3. Have students re-tell a story in their own words. (Listens effectively to spoken language).
4. Re-tell a story. Have students respond physically to the words in the story. (Use nonverbal cues that emphasize meaning).
5. Have students use puppets, masks, or a flannel board to tell their stories. (Use spoken language creatively to enjoy and participate in imaginative situations).
6. Use creative drama, role-play, or improvisation as a follow-up to storytelling. (Use spoken language creatively to enjoy and participate in imaginative situations).

Remember, communication competencies are developed not only in the telling of the story, but also in its analysis and preparation.

Assessment

Included in the Appendix are evaluation forms for assessing students' performances.

Conclusion

In this paper I have briefly described storytelling and provided some activities to demonstrate how storytelling can help develop communication competencies.

Remember, too, that we may teach much by the stories we tell in our classrooms -- about storytelling, about ourselves, about our content. As Jakob Amstutz, philosophy professor emeritus, University of Guelph, suggests:

> "I tell a lot of stories. Stories are nails that I hammer into the wall. On those nails I can hang up the whole, usually abstract, conceptual stuff of a philosophy course. If there are no nails in the wall, all the stuff falls down and will be forgotten. But if there are stories, illustrations and visualizations, they will not be forgotten; and contained in the stories there are the problems and the concepts. Years later students will remembesr the stories and because of the stories, still understand the concepts."

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Storytelling Evaluation #1

Was the storyteller able to:

	Exciting	Quite Good	Adequate	Needs Development
motivate the audience to listen				
convey sequence of events clearly				
share the story with enthusiasm				
create interesting characters				
create vivid images				
establish mood				
find appropriate tempos				
articulate and project effectively				
avoid linguistic garbage (umm, er, you know)				
utilize paralanguage effectively				
use gesture and movement expressively				
end the story gracefully				
overall evaluation				

Comments:

Adapted from Livo's Storytelling: Process and Product

Storytelling Evaluation #2

Name of storyteller:_____Date:_____

Name of evaluator:_____

1. Specifically , what did you like about this story?

_____

_____

_____

2. How did the storyteller use language, voice, gestures, and body movement to help you create a mental image of the characters, setting and time?

_____

_____

_____

3. List five things you think the storyteller did that made his or her story enjoyable to the listener.

a._____

b._____

c._____

d._____

e._____

4. What suggestions for improvement would you make to this storyteller?

FAMILY STORIES, ANECDOTES, AND RECOLLECTIONS

NAME_____PHONE_____

RELATIONSHIP TO FAMILY_____
_____

ADDRESS_____CITY_____STATE_____ZIP_____

Can you recall a story or anecdote concerning a quirk or unusual behavior pattern of a family member (who, when, where, what):

Can you recall something that happened in your childhood that brought you closer to your parents, grandparents, or other family member?

Can you recall any incidents involving your grandparents that are memorable for their humor or another reason? (Please include names of grandparents, where living at time and approximate date)

Can you recall an unusual remedy a grandparent, or parent (or other family member) consistently used for a particular ailment? (What and why, and how was it made?)

What were your favorite games or pastimes as a child? With whom did you do them? When?

Can you recall a particularly funny or embarrassing moment that happened at a Pickett family gathering? (Possibly a holiday such as Christmas, or Easter, or on a birthday)

Please feel free to write of other incidents, stories, or memories that might include: exciting, frustrating, frightening moments; first dates, parties; family

traditions you are continuing in your lives; family stories of parents, great-parents you have passed down to your children; hardships; turning points; good advice.